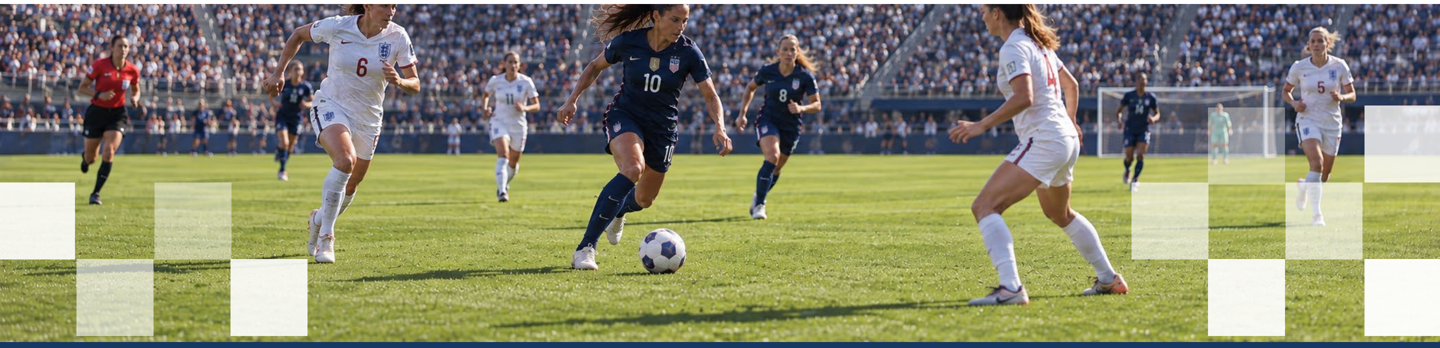
PLANNING & STRATEGIC ADVICE

Beyond the Contract: Building the Team Around the Athlete

Authored by: Matt Metsch, Damon Gooch and Victor Abiamiri | September 2026



Insights from Brown Advisory

Fast Reading:

- Modern athletes are businesses, brands and high-visibility targets, often before they have the structure to manage financial, personal and reputational demands.
- Long before the first check arrives, planning should clarify what the athlete wants current earnings to accomplish in the near term and over a lifetime. Those goals can then be translated into a cash-flow and investment model that shows how current decisions affect the capital available for the future.
- Beyond providing advice, the right team coordinates legal, tax, investment and business decisions so the athlete can see how contractual fees, taxes and spending affect liquidity and the capital available to invest. Privacy and asset protection should be part of that planning, and athletes operating across jurisdictions may require specialized tax advice.
- Governance is essential throughout an athlete's journey, from NIL and initial contract negotiations to later career opportunities, entrepreneurial pursuits, retirement and legacy building. The goal is to empower sound decision-making without limiting access to legitimate opportunities.

Today's athletes often find themselves managing far more than a career in sports. They are balancing business interests, personal brands, investments, employees and the demands of being public figures. Financial complexity can arrive before the infrastructure needed to support it. A meaningful increase in income may occur almost overnight, while decision-making processes, advisory relationships and oversight mechanisms remain relatively informal. Over time, as wealth, responsibilities and opportunities expand, managing the ecosystem around the athlete becomes just as important as managing the assets themselves.

Before evaluating individual decisions, the athlete and their advisory team should first establish what their financial resources are intended to support. Near-term priorities may include taxes, housing, family support or sufficient liquidity for current needs. Longer-term goals may involve financial independence, business ownership, philanthropy, family security or life after competition. Spending time on those priorities early gives the athlete and advisory team a framework for evaluating the choices that follow.

At each stage, success draws more people into the athlete's orbit. Some bring value. Others bring requests, urgency or conflicts that are difficult to see in the moment. The central planning challenge extends beyond investing income to creating an environment in which sound decisions can be made while the athlete remains focused on performance. The first question, then, should not be "How much can I earn?" but "What needs to be in place around me before the next consequential decision arrives?" The answer starts with a coordinated advisory team, a practical decision-making framework for opportunities and requests, and a strategic plan for philanthropy and life after competition. The athlete remains the CEO of a performance-driven enterprise, but success depends on the coordinated effort of the athlete's team.

Build the Team Before It Is Tested

An athlete's visibility creates a distinctive form of access. Opportunities often arrive through trusted relationships rather than formal channels. A friend forwards a pitch, a family member asks for help, a sponsor proposes a side venture or an advisor introduces another advisor. Because the request comes from someone familiar, the athlete may feel pressure to respond quickly or personally.

This is where a clear decision-making process provides a lot of value. It creates a brief pause between introduction and commitment, giving the athlete a consistent way to route a proposal, test its assumptions and understand who benefits. By serving as an intelligent filter, the process helps legitimate opportunities move forward while keeping noise, avoidable risk and unnecessary demands from consuming the athlete's time.

Rather than vesting sweeping control in one person, the stronger model relies on a coordinated team with clear responsibilities and meaningful separation between advice, approval and custody.

An agent may be best positioned to negotiate playing and endorsement agreements. Counsel should review legal exposure. A tax advisor needs visibility into income, residency and entity structure. An investment advisor should connect the portfolio to spending and long-term goals, while a business manager may handle the practical flow of bills and records. The exact mix of roles will vary. Privacy and asset protection belong in that same planning framework. For athletes who earn or compete across multiple states or countries, the tax advisor may also need to evaluate tax considerations across jurisdictions. What matters is that someone sees the whole picture and that no one person can originate an idea, approve it and move the money without independent review.

Coordination is often the missing function. Each advisor can perform well within a narrow lane while the athlete still makes a poor overall decision. A private investment may look attractive in isolation but create a tax bill, liquidity squeeze or reputational conflict elsewhere. A major purchase may be affordable today but incompatible with the long-term spending plan. The lead advisor or family-office function should connect those consequences and present them in language the athlete can act on.

The Athlete Is the CEO

Professional athletes have something important in common with business builders: much of their economic value is concentrated in a single enterprise. For a founder, that enterprise is the company. For an athlete, it is a career powered by health, performance and personal brand. Both can produce substantial liquidity, but neither should be treated as a permanent source of cash flow.

Depending on the sport and the individual, income may come from a team contract, prize winnings, endorsements, licensing or media work such as commentating. Agent and manager fees, taxes and other obligations can further reduce the amount available to spend or invest. Looking across those income sources and obligations gives the athlete a more useful view of career cash flow.

A cash-flow and investment model can show how spending, saving and investing during the earning years affect the pool that may eventually need to support the athlete and family after professional income declines or stops.

This is especially important after early success. A first major contract can create the impression that the window has opened. A second or third can create the more dangerous impression that it will remain open. The plan should resist both assumptions. It should define a sustainable lifestyle, hold sufficient liquidity for taxes and near-term needs and invest the remainder according to the athlete's lifetime objectives rather than the mood of the current season.

A useful distinction is the difference between career cash flow and lifetime capital. Career cash flow creates flexibility while the athlete is earning. Lifetime capital is the pool that may eventually need to carry the athlete and family when the checks stop. Treating every dollar as spendable income obscures that distinction and makes future independence harder to measure. As CEO, the athlete establishes objectives, appoints capable people and reserves the decisions that truly require judgment. The advisory team reduces complexity without hiding it, so the athlete can remain informed without managing every detail.

That begins with decision rights. Everyone involved should know who may introduce an opportunity, who reviews it, who can authorize action and how the decision is documented. A short quarterly meeting can keep cash flow, taxes, insurance, major commitments and upcoming decisions visible. An annual planning session can revisit the athlete's career stage, family priorities, risk capacity and post-career goals. This cadence makes good judgment routine before urgency takes over, without creating unnecessary bureaucracy.

Generosity Needs a Structure

For many athletes, the hardest decisions involve people who contributed to their success and whose needs feel personal. Supporting family, friends or a community can be one of the most meaningful uses of wealth, yet it can also create strain when every request is handled as a separate emotional decision.

A thoughtful policy can preserve the generosity while reducing the friction. The athlete and advisory team can agree in advance on an annual amount, the kinds of support the athlete is comfortable providing and the process for evaluating larger requests. It is also important to distinguish a gift from a loan. A "loan" that is unlikely to be repaid can damage both the balance sheet and the relationship, while a clearly stated gift may allow everyone to proceed with more honest expectations.

A clear structure can preserve the personal intent of generosity by allowing the athlete to say, "This is how I help," instead of deciding under pressure whether saying no to a request means saying no to a person.

Philanthropy can benefit from the same kind of deliberation. Rather than committing early to a fixed structure or set of causes, the athlete can take time to learn where giving fits among broader goals, which communities matter most and how involved they want to be. A patient approach allows the strategy to become more focused as those preferences take shape.

Planning for the Career After the Career

As athletes become more established, this structure becomes even more important because the decisions often grow more complex. Later contracts may coincide with ownership stakes, real estate, philanthropy, media work or new business ventures. At the same time, the athlete may be supporting a family and thinking more seriously about life after competition. The goals and financial model established earlier can help show which of those opportunities fit within the athlete's longer-term priorities and resources.

Retirement reshapes finances, day-to-day operations and personal priorities. The rhythm of income shifts, the professional infrastructure around the athlete may recede and the question of purpose becomes more immediate. Athletes who begin this work before the final season have more room to test ideas, build skills and decide which opportunities belong in the next chapter.

Legacy should be treated with the same discipline. For some, it means creating durable security for family. For others, it may involve philanthropy, ownership, mentoring or a business that can outlast the playing career. Whatever form life after sport takes, the athlete should reach that point with capital, relationships and choices intact.

Closing Thought: The Team Around the Talent

Athletic careers are built around preparation, specialist coaching and clear roles. A sound financial life deserves the same attention. That begins with clarity about what current earnings are meant to support and how today's decisions affect the capital available for later. The athlete remains at the center, but the quality of the system around the athlete will often determine whether success becomes durable wealth or a series of disconnected decisions.

The best structure keeps the athlete connected and open to opportunity while clarifying access, separating authority, bringing the right expertise into the room and creating enough time for judgment. Built early and revisited at each career inflection point, that structure can turn a short and uncertain earning window into something more lasting: agency over the next decision and the freedom to shape what comes after the game.

We are always here to advise on these matters with the athlete and their chosen team. We look forward to helping them get to the finish line they desire for themselves and the people they care about.